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ADVISORY SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category I)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[6 February 1992]

1. Recent years have witnessed fundamental changes occurring in a growing number of countries which affect the constitutional role and structure of their Parliaments. For example, during a 12-month period ending in the middle of last year, 18 countries (of which 14 are in Africa) instituted changes in their constitutions and basic laws which had the effect of abolishing one-party systems and introducing multipartyism. In many of these same countries, and indeed elsewhere, efforts were under way to enhance the role of national Parliaments as the legislative branch of Government.

2. In response to these developments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union recently decided to expand its technical cooperation programme originally established in 1973 for the purpose of assisting Parliaments of new and developing countries. Through this programme, the Union mobilizes international support and funding for the strengthening of representative institutions. The programme benefits from the active support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and bilateral donors. It offers expert advice on the structure and working methods of legislative assemblies as well as the organization of staff training courses and the provision of technical equipment and other material resources. Most recently, technical experts undertook needs assessment missions on behalf of the IPU to the Parliaments of Mongolia and Viet Nam and other missions are planned for the Baltic States as well as the Parliaments of several other countries.

3. The Technical Cooperation Programme is part of a larger effort launched by the Union as early as 1965 to contribute to a better knowledge of the working of representative institutions.

4. As part of this effort, the Union systematically collects and disseminates information on the constitutional powers, structure and working methods of national Parliaments, on the status of their members, on national electoral systems as well as on national parliamentary elections and their results. The Union maintains an updated collection of constitutions of sovereign States, their electoral laws, standing orders/rules of procedure and other laws relating to Parliaments. Moreover, the Union has a collection of over 6,000 volumes - books, periodicals and articles mainly concerning constitutional and parliamentary law. The Union is currently in the process of developing several databases in which much of this information will be stored.

5. The Union also prepares and publishes comparative studies on Parliaments and electoral systems, periodicals, monographs and reference materials for use by parliamentarians, academics and the public at large. These publications include among others a reference compendium entitled "Parliaments of the World", a world directory of Parliaments, and another of parliamentary human rights bodies, as well as a Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments published annually since 1967.

6. Finally, the Union is increasingly working in support of the United Nations in the fields of electoral assistance and election monitoring. A comparative study of national electoral systems is under preparation and consideration is also being given to the development of criteria for assessing free and fair elections.